

VZCZCXRO1759

OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK

DE RUEHGB #1256/01 1011939

ZNY SSSSS ZZH

O 111939Z APR 07

FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0687

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 001256

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/10/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL PINS IR TU IZ

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR, TALABANI, BARZANI DISCUSS IMPROVING
RELATIONS WITH TURKEY, OTHER TOPICS

REF: BAGHDAD 1157

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan Crocker per 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Iraqi President Jalal Talabani April 9 discussed with the Ambassador how to improve Iraq-Turkey relations after Iraq decided to hold its next Neighbors' Conference in Egypt instead of Istanbul. During his meeting with Talabani the Ambassador also urged Talabani to act on the PKK issue, to push for quick agreement on the package of hydrocarbons laws under consideration, and to introduce to the Council of Representatives (CoR) the draft de-Ba'athification law approved by Talabani and Prime Minister Maliki. Talabani called Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan on April 9 to smooth things over, noting that he thought Erdogan was pleased. The Ambassador spoke later that day with Kurdistan Regional Government president Massoud Barzani about Barzani's recently reported statements on Turkish interference in Iraq. Barzani said, and Post confirmed, that these statements were actually made February 27 and that he released another statement toning down his position and calling for cooperation. End Summary.

Progress in Kurdistan

¶3. (C) Talabani said during his April 9 meeting with the Ambassador that they were celebrating in Kurdistan that day - they consider April 9 their national day. He told the Ambassador about how Kurdistan had improved since Operation Iraqi Freedom: the region has gone from having from 6 to 1,000 millionaires, increased trade with many countries, finished two hospitals with five more under construction, and planned to open an American University in Sulaymaniyah. He invited the Ambassador to accompany him when he returns to the Kurdistan Region on April 27.

Iraq-Turkey Relations

¶4. (C) Talabani replayed his conversation with Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan at the Arab Summit in Riyadh (reftel) and added that he told Erdogan that Turkey was a key partner for Iraq, characterizing Turkey as "an important counterbalance to Iran." He said Erdogan responded by asking what he could do further to help with this "balance" (Talabani did not elaborate further on this point). Talabani said he underscored to Erdogan the importance of Turkey's eventual membership in the European Union and role as a democratic neighbor to Iraq. He said he praised Erdogan's policies toward the Kurds, noting that under previous governments the Kurdish holiday of Nawroz was prohibited. Talabani reported that Erdogan agreed on the need for good bilateral relations and offered to help train Iraqi police.

¶5. (C) According to Talabani, Erdogan expressed dismay at KRG President Barzani's recent statements in the media threatening to retaliate in the event of Turkish intervention in Iraq. Talabani told Erdogan at the Arab Summit he blamed Turkey for elevating the rhetoric, noting that Turkish officials had also been making inflammatory statements in the media. He noted that the Turks had invited Sunni Arabs, Shia, Turkomen, and KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani to a conference in Turkey a few months ago but then prevented Nechirvan from coming. Talabani said he reiterated to Erdogan that the contentious issues between Turkey and Iraq could not be decided through media and propaganda. Talabani noted to the Ambassador the need for U.S. Special Envoy for Countering the PKK General Joseph Ralston to try to improve relations with Turkey. He said this is an election year for Turkey and "many in Turkey" want to prevent Erdogan from becoming president.

¶6. (C) The Ambassador replied that the Turks were now upset because Iraq decided to host the next round of the Neighbors' conference and the International Compact for Iraq (ICI) in Egypt instead of Istanbul. Talabani explained that the Political Council for National Security (PCNS), comprised of top government and party leaders, made this decision. He added that he was the only one at the PCNS meeting who voted for Turkey - the others were sold on Egypt because it is an Arab country and Prime Minister Maliki thought Turkey would "cause problems." The Ambassador accepted that but said that Turkey is an important partner. Talabani agreed to the Ambassador's request that he call Erdogan to try to smooth things over. Talabani agreed.

PKK and Iran

BAGHDAD 00001256 002 OF 003

¶7. (C) During the April 9 conversation, the Ambassador raised with Talabani the issue of an annual conference of the PKK allegedly meeting in Dohuk in the Kurdistan Region. Talabani said he talked to Barzani about the PKK and they agreed it is not in their interests to support the PKK but some in Kurdistan are doing it "without official permission."

Talabani stated he had helped to close PKK offices in Kurdistan and Baghdad, but most of the PKK problems were in Barzani's area of influence. He suggested the Ambassador raise the issue with Barzani, but promised to do what he could to restrict the movement of PKK.

Talabani mentioned that during his trip to Iran in the fall, IRGC QF commander Soleimani promised to turn over individual in Iran who had tried to assassinate him. Soleimani, however, had yet to do so. Talabani said he asked the Iranians again about this and was told "they would arrive soon." He believed that the Iranians were delaying on this issue due to their worries about Iranian-opposition Kurds currently in Kurdistan and the strong relationship between the U.S. and the Kurds.

Hydrocarbons

¶8. (C) The Ambassador pushed Talabani to help on the hydrocarbons law. Talabani said he would, but he thought that most of the potential problems had been worked out. He expressed the view that revenue sharing was captured in the constitution so it should not be an issue. He noted his statement at the Arab summit that oil was for all of Iraq. Talabani asked why the USG was not encouraging U.S. companies to come to the KRG. The Ambassador responded that they are waiting for the hydrocarbons package to work out. He reiterated that the sooner the law was passed the better for both U.S. investors and for encouraging Iraq's neighbors.

¶9. (C) The Ambassador urged Talabani to keep pressing on the draft de-Ba'athification law that Talabani and the Prime Minister had signed at the end of March. Talabani said he had spoken to chair of the Higher National De-Ba'athification Commission Ahmed Chalabi and encouraged him to pass this law through the Council of Representatives (CoR). He encouraged Chalabi to discuss the issue with the Ambassador as well. Talabani claimed that the draft law was well-received at the Arab Summit and that the former Ba'ath party members now in Syria were waiting for the revised law so they could return to work in Iraq. He explained the faction of the Ba'ath party led by Muhammad Yunis Ahmed was waiting on a new law before it publicly condemned violence and terrorism and promoted the political process. In Talabani's view, Iraq could still benefit from the Ba'athists who are "not really Ba'athists."

¶10. (C) The Ambassador reiterated the importance of getting the Talabani-PM draft of the de-Ba'athification law signed on March 26 to the CoR. Talabani replied that it should pass through the Council of Ministers first, but if that was not successful the Presidency could submit it directly to the CoR. He said he is just waiting on the PM's return from Japan on April 13 to make a decision.

Keeping the Sunnis Engaged

¶11. (C) Asked about the potential withdrawal of the Sunni Tuwafiq bloc from the government, Talabani opined that the Sunnis feel like they are not a partner in policy-making. He reiterated his plan to deal with this problem by holding regular meetings of the PCNS, of the Presidency, and between Presidency and PM. He also said the three presidencies of the branches of government (President, PM, and CoR Speaker) should begin meeting regularly. Talabani said he and Shia VP Mehdi had met with Sunni VP Hashimi to convince him to remain in the government. Talabani said after the April 3-4 attacks by AQI on the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) headquarters he sent his presidential guard to protect the IIP and gave them \$200,000 for reconstruction (\$100,000 each from the Presidency and the PUK). He said it is important the IIP feels like it has friends. He asserted that the Presidency cooperates across sectarian lines but that "others do not have the same good relationship."

Turkey: Talabani's Call to Erdogan

BAGHDAD 00001256 003 OF 003

¶12. (C) Talabani later that day provided a readout to the Ambassador of his April 9 telephone conversation with Erdogan. Talabani told Erdogan that he was working closely with Barzani to take measures to contain the PKK. Erdogan raised Turkey's disappointment that the conference would not be held in Istanbul. Talabani explained that Iraq has issues with its Arab neighbors and he asked for Turkey's indulgence, explaining that Arab leaders would have difficulty accepting a conference in Turkey as they are not as "enlightened." In Talabani's estimation, Erdogan was pleased with the conversation.

¶13. (C) Again on April 9 the Ambassador spoke by phone to Talabani, who said he had talked to Barzani and told him to make a positive statement toward Turkey. At the suggestion of Talabani and Foreign Minister Zebari, the Ambassador called Barzani to reiterate this request. Barzani told the Ambassador that he had never made the statements recently attributed to him in the media. He suggested, rather, that an earlier statement he made on February 27 had been merely

been released again and distorted (Note: The Al-Arabiayah reporter who conducted the interview confirmed that it occurred on February 27 at Barzani's residence in the Kurdistan Region. End Note). He speculated that this interview was being aired again now to cause trouble. At the same time, Barzani pointed to Turkey as the culprit for heightened rhetoric, noting a list he had of 17 negative or threatening statements Turkey had made in recent weeks and months.

¶14. (U) Barzani said he told his staff to issue a statement on moderation, cooperation and brotherhood, which Post confirmed was issued on April 10 (septel).

CROCKER